DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 470 936 CE 084 122

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TITLE	Contributions for Strengthening and Promoting Processes of Social Organizations Into Organizations with Political Processes.
PUB DATE	2002-05-00
NOTE	16p.; In: "The Cyril O. Houle Scholars in Adult and Continuing Education Program Global Research Perspectives: Volume 2" compiled by Ronald M. Cervero, Bradley C. Courtenay and Catherine H. Monaghan, May 2002. Translated by Nikki Ashcraft.
AVAILABLE FROM	For full text: http://www.coe.uga.edu/hsp/monographs2/giraldo.pdf. For full text in Spanish: http://www.coe.uga.edu/hsp/monographs2/giraldospanish.pdf.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143) -- Translations (170)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Citizen Participation; Community Development; Developing Nations; Disadvantaged; *Females; Feminism; Foreign Countries; Government Role; Hermeneutics; *Informal Education; Mothers; Political Attitudes; *Political Influences; Political Socialization; Qualitative Research; Self Help Programs; *Social Organizations
IDENTIFIERS	*Colombia; Marginalized Groups; Narrative Inquiry; *Political Action

ABSTRACT

A qualitative study examined how formal and informal social and cultural learning for political action was incorporated into two women's organizations in Colombia: the Association of Daycare Mothers and the Community Mothers. Research was guided by the historic hermeneutic method, which identifies experience through the narrative testimonies of participants. The epistemological foundations of the study included social psychology of need, radical democratic feminism, and the logic of collective action. Techniques used were narrative and memory workshops. Among the specific questions examined were the following: How have these organizations participated in political spaces? How are they established as a political alternative in the public space? How do traditional political parties influence political participation? What personal implications does the role of political actor have? What advice, assistance, and training did the women receive? It was found that through their political participation, these women are fostering a new public space in which feminine and masculine identities have the same possibilities and opportunities. They mobilize resources and tools in support of their community, their children, and women who are otherwise marginalized. (Contains 23 references.) (SK)

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Contributions for Strengthening and Promoting Processes of Social Organizations into Organizations with Political Processes*

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This research had the goal of understanding the political participation processes of the Madres Jardineras (Daycare Mothers) and the Madres Comunitarias (Community Mothers) of the locality of Usme, identifying tools and resources such as themes, discourse analysis, alliance strategies, local-national political context, participation strategies, that the women's organizations require to qualify their political responsibilities. The methodology was based in general on a qualitative approach and in specific on studies of narration that are adequate for the reconstruction of experience. Among the methods included in the qualitative approach, the research was guided by the historic hermeneutic method, which has the semi-structured interview and memory workshops as its primary instruments. The population that participated and benefited directly from the project were the women of the organizations: Association of Daycare Mothers (ASOMAJ) and two organizations of Community Mothers (ASIBRU and AURORA). The research was sustained from the epistemological approaches of radical democratic feminism, the psychology of need, and the approximation to the logic of collective action. The principal results produced by the research were the reflection and recognition on the part of the population, as active subjects with a political exercise in public from their female being, of a new public space where the feminine and the masculine have the same possibilities and opportunities, and a pedagogical proposal for adult women with a gender perspective.

The Issue/Problem

The current situation of the country and the problems that it faces at the social, economic, political, and cultural level, especially those derived from the polices of structural adjustment towards the introduction of a global economic model, inequities, the widening gap between rich and poor, the globalization of culture, the generalized violence that affects all dimensions, the State becoming illegitimate for some sectors of the population, corruption, among others, bring with them a feeling of hopelessness and powerlessness in Colombians. It is essential, without saying urgent, to present those purposeful actions that emerge in the daily life of the different social actors in Colombia. Those actions and proposals that try, consciously or unconsciously, to recover a sense of collective life in the middle of an apparent chaos, the actions that arise as an immediate response to problems, that little by little, due to the worsening of the crisis, have been converted into structural conflicts, felt by communities, organizations, and people of different sectors, group affiliations, classes, and ethnicities.

From the beginning of the 1970s, women from the disadvantaged sectors have been organizing themselves to respond to the distinct set of problems that vulnerable populations suffer. With alternative proposals, they have tried to serve in a holistic manner children under seven, senior citizens who have been abandoned, and women who are pregnant or nursing. All this labor has been realized in a unified way and with the intention of offering mutual support for the problems that run through the community, in the framework of an absent State that implements proposals of a social assistance character without the possibility of generating transformations at the core. The latest policies, from the government of the president Virgilio Barco to the current president Andrés Pastrana, have tried to utilize this community work as a form of diminishing the consequences of poverty without great costs and with a very high investment of feminine human talent.

The Association of Daycare Mothers (Asociación de Madres Jardineras-ASOMAJ) and the Community Mothers (Madres Comunitarias-ASIBRU and AURORAS), are a group of women who have been

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organizing at their own initiative in the south of the city of Bogotá. Implementing actions, they try to respond to the satisfaction of their basic needs (converted into strategists) relevant for their development as women, as community leaders and as an organization, who manage their actions through their own projects.

From their role in Daycare Mothers and Community Mothers, this group of women have achieved an organizational development with a concrete impact in the community and an accumulation in public work that re-creates a feminine political action that is not visible for the society, for certain sectors of the same community, and on occasion, for members of the same organizations because it does not respond to the mechanisms, steps, forms of expression proper to an (androcentric or masculine) sex/gender system. This system legitimates and dictates forms of being and acting in the world for men and women in accordance with irremovable roles according to sexual differences (men: productive fields; women: reproductive fields). For this very reason, the actions engaged in by this group of women are devalued and made invisible in such a way that the constructions themselves in the political action are denied, and that ethical reserve, which historically the women have generated and recreated collectively without falling into extremes, deals with a feminine political culture made of those daily life histories and of all those experiences that have been shaping their new identities. A feminine political culture is founded on the valuation of diversity and strives for a political exercise that broadens democracy and permits the construction and legitimization of different forms of citizenship.

One of the goals of the research was to become familiar with and understand the experience of the Daycare Mothers and Community Mothers of Usme in different spaces (community, academic, intellectual, and personal), and to make that psychosocial and sociopolitical dimension, which brings with it the constitution of new political and social actors, visible. As changing subjects they compare and implicitly question, through means of their silent social actions, the prevailing model and generate processes that have had the consolidation of identifications, the generation of new subjectivities, a consciousness of oneself, and a sense of oneself in relation to others as prerequisites.

The research project directly benefited the women who participated from ASOMAJ and ASIBRU, as measured by the evidence of the social and cultural learning of a formal and informal type that they have incorporated and generated through their political exercise in public. They, as women and as an organization, have managed to explicitly recognize the political component of their social labor and begin a process where they take responsibility as political actors who exercise power when interacting with the different local and district entities.

Facilitating the empowerment of the women involves identifying and understanding the difficulties and strengths that the organization has had to move forward in a more integral way and with more viable proposals within the community. It has a certain level of clarity facing the personal and collective costs that retaining and exercising power involves in realizing a political exercise in public from their feminine being.

To understand and make the women's social organizations' political exercise in public visible involves on one hand recognizing their exercise of power and contributing to individual and collective processes where the women win space in the face of their autonomy, identity, and subjectivity to arrive at more equitable frameworks, achieving the ongoing consolidation of feminine power as a significant power without being tied to external transactions. For many years, the women have retained implicit power, which used to be called "Influence." Explicit and legitimate power has been denied to women, and, as a consequence of this, their actions and processes within a political dimension have been made invisible. As Valcárcel (1997) stated, "Power which is explicit and at the same time legitimate is preeminently political power" (p. 96). On the other hand, it involves immersing oneself in their processes of cognition, which are cultural and social, formal and informal, and understanding how this set interacts in a dynamic and constant way to generate a different action in public.

The question that structured the research was: How have the social and cultural learning of the formal and informal type been incorporated and recreated in the construction of discourses, practices, tools, and mechanisms in the women's social organizations (Daycare Mothers of DABS and Community Mothers of ICBF) in Locality 5 of Bogotá to realize a political exercise in public?

Theoretical Framework and the Purpose of the Study

The epistemological foundations that guided and oriented the research were those of a social psychology of need, radical democratic feminism, and the approximation to the logic of collective action. The social psychology of need "strives to save in each man –and woman- that conflict that tears him up inside, giving him the ability to integrate his individuality, his self, with that social world to which he belongs and inhabits" (Pichón-Riviére-Riviére, 1966/1967); a social psychology that approaches the subject immersed in his daily relationships to understand the development, the transformations, and the existing relationships between the social structure and the configuration of an internal world "founded on his relations of need". In this way, it achieves a new discourse that articulates a wider vision of the needs and interests of women facing other different subjectivities. The social psychology of need, according to Pichón-Riviére (1972), has as its objective:

> ...the development and the transformation of a dialectical relationship, which exists between the social structure and the unconscious fantasy of the subject, based on his relationships of need. In other words, the relation between social structure and the configuration of an internal world of the subject...

It deals with a social psychology that constantly needs to refer to the changing contexts to possess a greater approach to reality and the complex interpretation of the social facts and the diverse needs of the subjects; a social psychology that investigates the interaction between the internal world and the external world, keeping in mind that Pichón-Riviére (1972) wrote:

> The human being is a being of needs who is only socially satisfied in the relationships that determine him. The subject is not only a related subject, he is a subject produced in praxis. There is nothing in him that is not the result of the interaction between individual, groups, and class.

Radical democratic feminism is characterized by the deconstruction of a series of androcentric suppositions that shape the hegemonic culture; Barretto (1997, cited in Wills, 1999) understood androcentric as

> An organizing principle that grants an authority to the father, because of his sexual status, an authority that bears a series of prerogatives and powers over other members belonging to the same family network and in particular over women, children, and youth. (p. 19)

It is also that which, following the hierarchical bipolar logic, considers the male as the norm and the females as the deviation from the norm and extensively promotes the values associated with the masculine, like independence and power over others, and denies other values necessary for social life, such as affection, bonding, and unity, that have erroneously been considered exclusive to the world of women.

Similarly, radical democratic feminism has a notion of subject that is sensitive to history and to the collective memory as elements that structure not only their identities but also their subjectivities. For this epistemological line, "the contradictions of class do not contain, nor determine, nor exhaust other logics . . . since each category weighs more depending on the historic moment" (Wills, 1999, p. 21), and on the distinct time periods, keeping in mind that class and gender subordination and discrimination mutually reinforce each other.

The notion of subject or person refers to a being who does not act solely on the inspiration of his/her reason but also on his/her identifications with a symbolic and imaginary world full of logics which are different than the rational ones since the human being is also guided by his/her affect and emotion from which a relation with the external world is established to interact and understand in an individual or collective way the context or reality in which he/she is developed.

To approach an understanding of social processes in the framework of social processes that seek to convert their practices into collective actions with the capacity to participate in public-political settings involves recognizing the construction of new political subjects, the ideas that bring them together, the strategies, mechanisms, and procedures that they incorporate during their experiences as a cognitive process, which, at times, is translated into discourses that express their perspective of the world and the possibilities to transform it.

The recognition of these new political subjects is necessarily accompanied by the reconceptualization of the social structure; that is, the recognition of the existence of groups which arise according to interests, populations, ages, gender, among others, without the economic or the traditionally political being the only thing that brings them together. These new political subjects are constituted in the set of their meaningful practices and in the possibility of creating and accumulating power, not from the State as a privileged space but from the level of microsocial relations.

The new social practices appear with a double meaning: on one hand, the affirmation of the importance of daily life for the popular sectors and their process of organization and mobilization and on the other hand, their potential for revindication and their capacity for a dynamic response to some of the problems of our society such as nutrition, recreation, or education. This is how the organizational spaces seek the transformation of the living conditions of the popular sectors. Such spaces represent the interests of specific social groups, with particular characteristics according to the identity of who forms them, the ways in which their members are connected to production, and the levels of consciousness and struggle that they have reached.

The concepts that guided the immersion and the development of the research and served for the construction of the instrument and the interpretation of the results are:

Ethic of care. It is a knowing belonging to women that has been historically constructed, by women, as a collective product of submission and the continuous performance of traditionally feminine roles, like the work related to reproduction and the care of life as well as the responsibility for the other (ethical "knowing" that should also be extended to men). Its point of departure is the consciousness of forming part of a network of relationships in which the subjects depend on one another. This responsibility does not only consist in not doing anything to harm the rights of others, on occasion there is a moral duty to act and not to do so would be immoral. The ethic of care is based on the understanding of the world as a network of relations in which the "I" is inserted. Therefore, it is necessary to assume the particular point of view of the other, with the intervention of the feelings and the concern for the concrete details of the situation to be judged (Marín, 1998).

Ethic of justice. It can be understood as an inherent knowing historically constructed by the masculine culture, in opposition to the ethic of care that is based on the application of abstract formalistic moral judgments. These judgments suppose, for example, that any act is moral as long as it does not harm the rights of others, establishing minimal rules for cohabitation with which the subjects can be guided to arrive at fair results. This link to legal criteria (impartiality toward the other is important) is based on individual need without keeping the others in mind. In this context, from certain development models, the quality of indifferent relationships that characterize the life of men becomes something favorable and part of the norm that is considered immutable and from established or instituted agreements. Its fundamental role is that of legitimating the social system and regulating public life since it establishes rules that direct the way in which interpersonal and social conflicts should be resolved through consensus following a stipulated procedure without giving importance to the content of the dispute. The ethic of justice is utilized to block debate on values and to deactivate the critique of dominant values (Marín, 1998).

The political. It refers to the system of values, beliefs, representations, and images that include an exercise of power and which

> can emerge from any type of social relations in the moment in which these are constructed under the form of antagonism or the form of friend-enemy. In this sense, the political can emerge from the relations between men and women, between social relations of the religious, ethnic, economic, or any other type. (Mouffe, 1996, p. 142 in Atilli, 1996)

Politics. "Set of individual and collective activities (carried out by parties, groups, and/or social organizations), related to the exercise of power, dealing as much with conquering it as exercising and defending it" (Ricoeur, 1995, p. 129), in support of satisfying the needs and interests of a specific group or social sector.

Political subjectivity. It is a dimension of subjectivity that recognizes the set of perceptions, feelings, values, norms, and ways of being and acting within a political system of which the subjects become an active part through the exercise of power that is established in the daily interactions.

Public arena. Generally it has been understood as one of the spheres of life (traditionally opposed to the private) that has been identified with the world of freedom (Brunner, 1983) and "equality," which allows greater dimensions of sociability and of the exercise of power. With the expansion of the market, the public arena tends to disintegrate under the expansive pressure of a market of messages or cultural industry through which consensus and dissent of great impact are achieved through the circulation of discourses that construct the "common meaning" of the moment and the configuration of the civic role. The public arena includes

> sufficient participation and representation of interests and multiple perspectives to permit the majority of the people, the majority of the time, to recognize themselves in their discourses and to find in the discourses of the public arena representations of their needs, interests, aspirations, life problems, and

worries, which are sufficiently similar to justify their own living self-representations, identities, and feelings. (Fraser, 1997, p. 32)

Private arena. It is that sphere or space that had been identified with the world of need, the domestic, and the familiar. However, currently with the tendency to privatize existence and the economic relations of exclusion of thousands of men and women, the great industrial company, and the game of the labor market for their subsistence, many of them have turned back to depending more each time on certain "survival strategies" that have their place in the home and that are supported in the reciprocal services of the family and neighborhood groups.

Women's social organization. A group of women who define their objectives and begin to act as a consequence since the interests that identify the group are the interests of their community and sector (Rivera, 1989). These women's organizations have the needs and interests of their participants as a collective in mind, which is reflected in the structure, practices, and projects of the organization itself.

Considering that the democratization of the social relations has the existence of an organized social base that works in defense of their interests and the achievement of their goals as a condition, the purpose of the study was to understand the processes of political participation, identifying tools and resources (themes, discourse analysis, alliance strategies, local-national political context, participation strategies, among others) that the women's organizations require to qualify their political responsibility.

Specific Questions the Study is Designed to Address

1. What resources do the women of these organizations have in the matter of education for political participation?
2. How have these women's organizations been participating in political spaces?
3. What have the proposals and projects of these organizations been?
4. How do these organizations define the spaces of participation and the strategies to follow?
5. How are these organizations established as a political alternative in the public space?
6. What is the influence of traditional political parties in the political participation process?
7. What personal implications does assuming the role of a political actor bring for the woman who belongs to a social organization?
8. How do the organizations realize alliances and negotiations with alternatives movements and/or traditional political parties?
9. What advice, assistance, and training were there from people with expertise in the political process?
10. What experience with language and use of the public space do the women participating in the process have?

Data Collection and Analysis

To approach the object of study of the research, a qualitative approach to research was selected in general and the studies of narration adequate for the reconstruction of experience in specific. This approach is interesting because it privileges the complexity of human behavior in the contexts of daily interaction to capture social reality through the perspective and the logic belonging to the people or population group participating in the study, beginning with the perception that they have of their own context. In addition, the approach makes possible the collection and analysis of data to obtain an exploration of the context with the goal of understanding the reality that underlies the phenomenon under study.

The qualitative approach explores the knowledge, meaning, interpretations, and values that individuals share in a determined spatial and temporal context, using theory as an instrument that guides the process since the challenge of the qualitative researcher is "to not lose sight that the knowledge that is sought as a point of reference is that of the individuals studied and not exclusively that which is guaranteed by the scientific communities" (Bonilla, 1997, p. 215).

Among the methods included in the qualitative approach, the research was guided by the historic hermeneutic method, which has the human experience that is recovered through direct testimonies, the written

tradition, and/or the different expressions of material culture (technology and technique), and the symbolic culture (mythology, arts, and language) as its object of understanding (CINDE, 1998).

With respect to hermeneutics and interpretation, Alfred Schuzt, cited in CINDE (1998), influenced by the phenomenology of Husserl, begins to see understanding from a procedure of interpretating the daily, which is employed to give meaning to actions. For this same reason, for the author, "the social actors live the social world like an intersubjective stage, which exists for us or is potentially accessible to each one of us through means of intercommunication and language" (CINDE, 1998, p. 67).

Based on the concept of Schutz, cited in CINDE (1998), on understanding the daily, the research sought to access the social world, the political environment of the Daycare and Community Mothers, through communication, valuing the voice of the women themselves since culturally they possess a great oral tradition that is recovered through eliciting their narrative thought where they express and transmit their interpretation of the world. The historic hermeneutic method offers us useful tools, with which the knowledge of the women themselves could be researched and understood from their internal structures. The design of the historic hermeneutic method permitted the approach to human action that, upon presenting itself as an open book, was susceptible to being interpreted, and therefore, to producing categories of analysis that helped the researchers to broaden the interpretation of the meanings in conjunction with the categories produced by the existing theoretical material.

It is of great importance to clarify that during the development of the study continuous feedback existed, with recognition of the context and identification of the problems and a constant revision of the theoretical suppositions that supported the process. The researchers were able to establish a dialogical and communicative relationship with the reality, assuming the premises of Wilcox, cited in CINDE (1998), who considers that

> to understand the particular, it is necessary to relate it with its environment, that is, to transcend the spatial-temporal dimensions, and, that it is necessary to utilize the existing social theory on the problem to approach reality and be able to understand it. (p. 77)

In this way, it is possible to interpret the social world of the group, having as a base theory, the suppositions to compare it with reality, and the timeline that surrounds the subjects.

Keeping in mind the primary objective of the research, it was considered relevant to employ narrative. Its use in qualitative research is due to the fact that human beings are beings who tell stories; also because "it is a way of characterizing the phenomena of the human experience...and of structuring said experience" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1995, p. 12). The importance of narrative as a research method lies in that it has the capacity of reproducing the experience of the subjects, whether it is at the individual or collective level, crossed by the particular meaning that is granted to it. The narration gives knowledge and the possibility of re-creating what has already been lived in a specific past time. For this reason, for the researchers Connelly and Clandinin (1995), it was important to keep in mind that

> the central work is evident when it is understood that the people are living their stories in a continuing experiential context, and at the same time, they are telling their stories with words while they reflect on their life experiences and explain themselves to others. For the researcher this is part of the complexity of narrative, because a life is also a question of growth toward an imaginary future, and therefore, it involves recounting stories and trying to relive them. One person is occupied by living, explaining, re-explaining, and reliving stories at the same time. (p. 22)

The learning and the lived experiences of the subjects acquire value when they are granted a meaning and in this way can be expressed through narrations, as Bruner (1983) stated:

> ...the narrative deals with human intentions and actions, with the vicissitudes and the consequences that mark its course and it tries to situate the experience in time and space...the inseparability of the person, the environment, and the action should be deeply embodied in the character itself of the narrative thought. (p. 25)

A narrative that has been structured in social groups through the continuous use of language, in which those beliefs and desires that are particular to the cultures and which are expressed in the accounts are put into practice, given that to communicate, it is necessary to structure the ideas either in an oral or written form. In this oral speech, women are found who employ the verbal and the nonverbal in their daily actions to state their thoughts.

It is because of this that it was considered relevant to elicit the memory of the women through the narration of experience as a central point that permitted the understanding of the women's political action in

public, given that it is in the accounts where the forms of being and acting in the world appear accessible for the study. For this it was considered relevant to return to the properties of narration stated by Bruner, who makes use of Ricoeur's statements.

To deal with research where the population is women, it is necessary to clarify how their narration is characterized, beginning with the idea that men and women utilize distinct communicative forms, keeping in mind that their very constitution, their practices, their position within society, and their biopsychosocial experiences are different, conferring upon each one of the genders "their special voice." Within the accounts of the women, it is important to keep in mind and inquire into the connections that are established between processes of subjectification and social processes to construct forms of life since it is precisely there where the narrated experience stops being a transparent and abstract idea and becomes a subject for research (Vega, 1997).

According to Patricia Violi (1997), for thousands of decades women have privileged secret and individual speech of life experiences, of intimacy, more than the generalized form of the collective. The existing differences between men and women

> are in themselves sources of richness that do not have to be nullified but rather made productive through the creation of a space where there is possibility of listening and they can be articulated and converted into word, discourse, and dialogue. (p. 14)

To generate spaces where women can narrate parts of their lives is to generate spaces of meaning production, in which the way the discursive practices that impact on the general level can modify the general forms of representations can be made visible without losing sight that it is essential to recover the individuality and its interconnection with the production of those collective meanings that exist within the common discourses.

Confidence becomes the most emphasized form of feminine expression in which women "devote themselves to chatting" to establish and preserve a relation, contrary to the communicative objective of men, where their interest is to transmit information, data, or knowledge. In the accounts of women, it is shown how conversations are spaces to tighten bonds, in which people try to seek support and self-affirmation, achieving consensus. In addition, life is illustrated as a community in which isolation is to be avoided, for which they make use of details and intimacy as elements that permit the negotiation of personal relations of a symmetric form among the women themselves.

The communicative environment in which women are socialized responds to a historic process in which oral speech is privileged, giving form to feminine oral cultures, as Deborah Tannen (1991) indicates, which employ verbalization of feelings and thoughts in the framework of private relations, which have the tendency to utilize their personal experience as a point of departure in place of abstract arguments. Since the logic of women tends to explain the world from a more private place, it observes and integrates their personal experience and establishes connections with the experiences of others.

In addition, Tannen (1991) considers that one of the great characteristics of feminine narratives is that they are presented in a fragmentary and reiterative way, with the insertion of evaluations, multiple details, and including subordinate stories in which the interventions of the different characters of the same narration are dramatized with the body and voice. In the same way, the woman who is narrating generally often feels that she should repeat those passages that have been successful and have aroused special excitement when represented, those that make the story seem more authentic. The previous brings an important disorganization in the presentation of the facts as a result since it returns to what was said in a reiterative way.

These characteristics of women's narration provided the necessary elements to carry out an interpretive exercise in which language was employed as a privileged vehicle of the women's expression through the different narrations of the experience of the political exercise in public. Likewise, the elements of the qualitative approach and the historic hermeneutic method made them adequate for the development of the research since it sought to establish the understanding of the processes of political participation in public in a argumentative and comprehensive way, identifying tools and resources (themes, discourse analysis, alliance strategies, local-national political context, participation strategies, among others) that the women's organizations require to qualify their political responsibility.

The interpretation of the interviews and the memory workshops involved a complex intellectual position on the part of the researchers that had as its base to propitiate equally complex connections between the theory elaborated, whose pillars are the epistemological foundations of a social psychology of need, radical democratic feminism, and the approximation to the logic of collective action on one hand, and the internal significance of the observed phenomenon themselves on the other.

During their initiation into the community activities, the women, some united with women's groups and others with mixed community groups, saw themselves confronting a public space in which "*you have to fight everything*," since only matters of common interest or public concern were debated and with one public, which put the differences of its members in parenthesis. These characteristics of the public space, as Fraser (1997) has stated well, do not permit the inclusion of minority groups into said space and in opposition, increases the levels and forms of discrimination for these groups since their real needs, interests, and projections are not heard and even more so if these voices come from women. Not only are the voices not heard, but at the same time, the utilization and understanding of a "specialized" language belonging to said space is difficult for these groups and in particular for women, who have not had access due to their level of education, their history, and the roles that have traditionally been developed throughout the different time periods.

As an alternative to achieve the inclusion of different groups, one should try instead to articulate public networks and areas of discussion and decision on their immediate destiny and on that of the group within a process of power accumulation. This brings into evidence the inequalities, combining spheres, interacting public and counterpublic, and the weak with the strong, as new classes of political exercise in public, which must be established and constituted by the citizens themselves within a legitimate exercise of demanding rights.

It is important to emphasize that during the beginning of the women of ASOMAJ, ASIBRU, and AURORA's processes not only were difficulties presented to them by the governmental institutions at the local and national level but also with the same community with which they worked, especially those women who were connected to mixed local or neighborhood groups:

> *in the neighborhoods there are always political bosses, right? Persecutors that a woman cannot be president...They are all men, who had struggled and worked and I don't know why they believed that a woman was a person who was not capable of struggling and working and who was qualified, and I feel that I am qualified*

So, it becomes evident how it is much more difficult for the woman who belongs to the popular sectors to realize a political exercise in the public arena, an exercise to demand rights, first by belonging to the most disadvantaged social sector and second, by the fact of being a woman and the preconceptions that exist of the feminine gender within the hegemonic masculine symbolic order.

During their initiation into community activities, the woman, and more concretely, the founders of the association, began to have direct contact with "*dishonest politicians*" understood as the "*manipulator*," "*who deceives*," "*they promise and they don't deliver*" with whom they realized alliances or small activities with the goal of "*accomplishing things for the community*," the same as with the "*political godfathers*" which make it necessary to be within a masculine public space with the characteristics previously mentioned.

With the passing of time, these women were participating in a more visible and active way within the public space, constructing alliances, that were not quite clear in the beginning, with state institutions, social organizations from other localities, and "*the politicians on duty*" without losing their objective and initial motivation "*to improve the quality of life of their community*." As mothers and making use of their feminine subjectivity, they center their attention on "*being a mother for other children*," moving from being mothers in the private space to being mothers in a public space, extending the traditional roles of women to the public space. As Alfaro (1999) states, analyzing a similar experience of popular women in Peru:

> The routes followed revert to reinforcing the traditional role of the woman as a mother and manager of the domestic arena, as the first strategy of a subject that could not eliminate her own identity to advance, because it would have dissolved as such. A process that upon arriving in the public and political arena has put into evidence the political deception of the citizenship facing masculine governors who won by corruption, political negotiation, and violence... (p. 6)

The entities representing the government in the Daycare Mothers project is the Administrative Department of Social Welfare (DABS), and in the Community Mothers project it is the Colombian Institute of Family Welfare (ICBF), who, when it convenes the women for the first time, offers some training for the development and care of minors and finances the construction, maintenance, and operation of the "Local Houses" and "Community Homes" respectively. From this moment, the women begin a process that is different than what they had had in their previous community activities. In the first phase of the process, they struggle for a "*better provision of service to the user community*" since just like with the "*dishonest politicians*," with whom they had been connected before, DABS and ICBF "*promise but do not deliver.*"

In the second phase of the process, the women make visible the fact that in the majority of the administrative actions of DABS and ICBF, the relations that are established with the officials are of the vertical, discriminatory, authoritarian, and subordinate type, in which the labor developed by the group, their conditions as women, their needs, interests and the development proposals that favor children and themselves are completely ignored.

The women, upon becoming conscious of their rights and in an exercise *"of thinking of themselves and in their needs"* and feeling *"abuse toward the daycare mother"* with more frequency, begin *"to analyze the situation in the intimacy of each local house"*, and they decide to join together as an organization of Daycare Mothers and an organization of Community Mothers at the local level with the goal of fighting for an allowance, health insurance, improvements in the markets and housing endowments, and in this way to broaden the coverage of these services as well as opening the service to other populations like "grandparents" and "scholars." The latter are boys and girls that are in primary or secondary school to whom lunch and support in their academic tasks are offered.

Keeping the above and the implications with regards to their work and positioning in mind, the women begin a process to reclaim their rights as an association and united with a district movement by means of strikes and sit-ins as the only means by which they can manage to be heard by the government. In this way they open spaces of negotiation, managing to obtain the allowance, the insurance, and direct transactions, along with making themselves responsible for the administration and budget management of each house and home.

In this way the Daycare Mothers and the Community Mothers of Usme act not only as mothers but also as popular women, expanding their social work to many more subjects hit by poverty. From leaders or members of an organization to protesting protagonists and negotiators with the local, district, and national institutions, putting pressure to obtain a budget for feeding and educating children of the popular classes and the legal acknowledgement of the organization of Daycare Mothers by means of great pressure marches with formal success.

This process experienced by the women of Usme, which is very similar in other localities of Santafé de Bogotá and for other women's groups, has been strongly denounced by some feminist and intellectual groups, affirming that such processes and actions do not have real effects on the change facing the situation of women and their process of empowerment. On the contrary, it leads to the affirmation of the traditional feminine roles within the public and private space. However, after not only reviewing the literature on the subject but also having had the opportunity to know a process with these characteristics and to hear the different narrations of the women about their experience, with their learning, it is true that these women, their family groups, the institutions with which they are related, and the community itself, not only recognize them as *"mothers of 90 children,"* but also know of their impact at the local and district level. They know and recognize their process of empowerment and the changes that it has generated not only for them in terms of new subjectivities but also for the Others with regards to questioning the traditional roles for men and women and their possibilities of participating in the different spaces.

It cannot be affirmed that the impact of their work has been beyond the local since the scope of said process does not go beyond the community with which they directly work, with their families and people and institutions near the same locality of the process. Their positioning as a women's organization is tightly related to their function and their stability within a specific government project. For this reason, their impact and political exercise has not managed to transcend the limits (on some occasions) of being "Daycare Mother" or "Community Mother." It is worthwhile to make allusion to the new spaces of dialogue and negotiation that have been created between DABS and the Daycare Mothers, in which the objective is to review policies that affect them as Daycare Mothers as well as to propose projects to support their development in conjunction with the institution. Unfortunately, such spaces have been characterized by a limited participation by the Daycare Mothers, either because the decisions have already been made in the time that they are discussed, converting them into *"stone guests,"* or because the knowledge of the mothers on the issue under discussion does not provide them sufficient tools to generate counter-arguments and more solid proposals, keeping in mind the context and the same bureaucratic apparatus with which they are related.

However, neither can the work and exercise that they have developed at the individual and collective level be ignored. For this reason, in spite of the fact that the present time of the organizations is not the best, we can affirm that the Daycare Mothers and the Community Mothers of Usme are realizing a political exercise in the public arena, understood as the actions that are generated from a specific group as a response to an infinite number of unsatisfied needs, of felt discrimination, an internal desire for self-improvement, and *"to be able to*

live with a better quality of life." It is an exercise that is born from the need to form and strengthen democratic subjects who make from political responsibility the expression of community interests.

Returning to the statements of Juanita Barreto (1997) on the obstacles that women must face to carry out a political exercise, we can say that for these women some of these obstacles do not act as such. On the contrary, they were aspects that stimulated a greater incursion into the public space and their political exercise.

The obstacle of being made invisible, which makes reference to the hidden presence of women, can be shown through language (semeiotics and linguistics), "that which is not named does not exist and therefore the pretense of the nonexistence of women which is implicit in those languages continues circulating and reproducing itself" (Barreto, 1997, p. 77). It is an obstacle that very few women of the same association have managed to overcome since a consciousness does not exist that differentiates between "nosotros" and "nosotras." [1] In the moment of making use of the word, women continue to be included within the larger category of men, blurring their differences and their particular needs.

On the other hand, during their process the women have confronted a set of social values that diminishes their labor and makes it invisible since the patriarchal system is characterized by the existence of a binary logic into which reality is divided: public space versus private space, presenting *the dichotomizing obstacle*, with a set of asymmetric meanings that show evaluating criteria of inferiority (private) or superiority (public), for example, calling them *"old women without work,"* becoming the base for limiting the role of women and their action in the social arena. Said obstacle is manifested in the constant devaluation on the part of their companions and members of the community. Moreover, they integrate their families and the community into the work realized, not only as Daycare and Community Mothers, but also as community leaders, permitting a revaluation of their actions and of the private space.

With respect to the *complementary obstacle*, which makes reference to the woman as complement of [man], and to the special difficulty to take responsibility as herself, we can say that women, due to their life histories and to the significant people who have accompanied them, have managed to develop a high level of autonomy, recognizing their needs, desires, and interests as well as the desires, needs, and interests of Others.

However, and as a result of the same sexual division of labor, the naturalization of maternity and its "responsibilities," as well as the exclusive public-private division, the Daycare Mothers of Usme take on the commitment of *"maintaining the union of the home"* leaving a lack of motivation and a great feeling of guilt within them upon dedicating more time to the activities that they wish to carry out, making the *guilt-giving obstacle* present. According to Barreto (1997), the *guilt-giving obstacle* has its origin in the founding myth of Adam and Eve, in which Eve incites Adam to try the forbidden fruit, for which they are then exiled from paradise, and so society has generated stereotypes of "good women" and "bad women," pointing to the bad women as those who violate the characteristics of femininity, signs that little by little they are forming part of a specific feminine subjectivity.

In the particular case of these organizations, *the maternalizing obstacle*, or the idealization of maternity and the identification of the female being with the maternal function, has not been presented as an obstacle. To the contrary, it has stimulated the women themselves to go out into the public space, making use of the different tools that they possess from their identity and feminine subjectivity, putting them to the service of the community within a political exercise proper to the women. It is not presented as an obstacle since the constitution of their female being is being made visible and revalued not only by other members of the family and the community but by the women themselves, generating a process facing the change of values. As Alfaro (1999) said,

> The routes followed revert to reinforcing the traditional role of the woman as a mother and manager of the domestic arena, as the first strategy of a subject that could not eliminate her own identity to advance, because it would have dissolved as such. (p. 6)

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[1] Translator's note. In Spanish, "nosotros" is the masculine form of "we." It is used when the speaker (male or female) belongs to a group of men or a mixed group of men and women. Being a masculine form, it conceals the existence of women in the group. "Nosotras" is the feminine form of "we." It can *only* be used by a female speaker who belongs to a group of women. The addition of one man to a group of women requires a change from the "nosotras" to the "nosotros" form. As Spanish speakers become more conscious about acknowledging women's existence, it has become more common to use the two forms together ("nosotros" and "nosotras") to indicate a mixed group.

In agreement with Barreto (1997), such an obstacle restricts the use of thought and words crossing through all exercises that women participate in because of the idealization of maternity.

In contrast to these statements, the experience of the Daycare Mothers and the Community Mothers in their political exercise in public makes their thoughts, voices, and words manifest within an eminently feminine political exercise that cannot be read from the outlines granted by a traditional masculine order. It is indispensable, as Ramírez (1997) states, to accept that the forms of women's participation are associated with the processes of identity construction and personal and social autonomy, with their multiple forms of acting in the spheres of reproduction and production in support of their families and their communities, and understanding politics as an exercise of power that exists in all the areas of human life.

These processes, where the women reach the public space to carry out actions of a different type, require to be read and understood from a lens where women are recognized as social subjects who are in constant construction, in which their vision of the world, their being and doing in a specific context are constantly being actualized. That is, they are being re-created in each moment and instant of life. To achieve the empowerment of the women and to make their efforts in support of improving their quality of life as human beings and women visible, it is essential to grant their real value to these processes, the ethical reserve, and the cultural ties of the women, which are the path itself of the individual and collective history of the female being. Undoubtedly, this group of women are political actors and they carry out a political exercise that does not correspond to the traditional type, or to the masculine type. To the contrary, it is an exercise that demonstrates all the feminine ethical reserve and directly and indirectly questions the social valuation, which is realized as much by men as by women, of women, their roles, their subjectivity, and their capacities.

The women from these organizations are political subjects who have been participating more explicitly in the public space little by little. As Rosa María Alfaro (1999) expresses:

> The new social movements which were preceded and composed by popular women in Latin America were weaving roads of inclusion as political subjects, not always in agreement with the way it was foreseen from our education and traditional sociopolitical pre-vision. So, they were not the efforts of confrontational social organizations but in general an uprising and connection of changes produced in the personal, the social, and the political, within the margins of a hard economy without guarantee of progress. Thousands of women initiated processes of dignified and proactive location in society, work, education, and political duties with moral support although separated from the public opinion, enchanted by the emancipatory dreams of modernity and the birth of a future hope in women, at least at the level of discourse. (p. 1-2)

The recognition of these new political subjects is necessarily accompanied by the reconceptualization of the social structure; that is, to recognize the existence of groups originating according to interests, populations, ages, gender, among others, without the economic or the traditionally political being the only element that brings them together. These new political subjects are constituted in the set of their significant practices and in the possibility of creating and accumulating power, not from the State as a privileged space but from the level of micro-social relations.

Mouffe (1999) states that "the objective of a democratic political system does not reside in eliminating passions nor in relegating them to the private sphere, but in mobilizing them and using them in accordance with the agonistic mechanisms that encourage respect for pluralism" (p. 14). Furthermore, "The objective of a democratic political system, therefore, is not to eradicate power but to multiply the spaces in which the power relations will be open to democratic debate" (p. 24).

Keeping these statements in mind, it can be affirmed that the women of Usme are not only realizing a political exercise suitable to their feminine identity, but also developing "a democratic political system" since they mobilize these struggles and passions in the public space which in the first instance could be exclusively concerned with the private arena. They mobilize resources, tools, and needs to the public space in support of the wellbeing of their community, of their children, and of many women who apparently do not have any impact on the development of society by belonging to the private arena. Mobilizing these elements to the public space and making them visible by different means at the district level has generated new political spaces, understood as:

> a space whose formation is an expression of the power relations, and these can give rise to very distinct configurations. This depends on the type of dominant interpretation of the principles of legitimacy and the form of hegemony that is established. (Mouffe, 1999, p. 24)

It is in this way that the women realize in these new political spaces an open exercise of power while they negotiate with public entities, and on some occasions private entities, their requests to improve their quality of life and to meet the objective that brought them together as an association of Daycare Mothers and as an organization of Community Mothers.

To be able to really visualize the importance of the social processes and to understand the nature of new struggles, like those realized by these women, the following are necessary:

1. A notion of subject that is sensitive to history and collective memory as elements that structure not only his/her identities but also his/her subjectivities. A subject is in constant construction where his/her identities and subjectivities are opening and in a certain degree of ambiguity in the way in which they are articulated to new and different subjective positions (Mouffe, 1999). The social sciences must approach a subject with recognition of his/her plurality and not as a homogeneous and unified entity.
2. The recognition and creation of new subjective positions permit the articulation of the demands of each one of the groups with those of the others, establishing "a balance between the different struggles" (Mouffe, 1999, p. 40). This makes the multiple social relations visible in which alliances are not established just to establish them but so that their subjectivities are really modified and enriched in the moment in which the rights are extended to clearly include groups that are marginalized or socially excluded.
3. To understand citizenship as "a principle of articulation that affects the different subjective positions of the social agent although it recognizes a plurality of specific loyalties and respect for individual liberty" (Mouffe, 1999, p. 101).
4. To understand the public space as a space in which consent is produced:
   (C) onsent by means of the circulation of discourses that construct the "common meaning" of the moment...The public arena includes sufficient participation, representation of interests, and multiple perspectives to permit the majority of the people, the majority of the time, to recognize themselves in its discourses and to find in the discourses of the public arena representations of their needs, interests, aspirations, life problems, and concerns sufficiently similar to justify their own lived self-representations, identities, and feelings. (Fraser, 1997, p. 32)
5. With regards to the women's struggles and social processes, it is important to think of a feminist political system understood as the pursuit of the women's goals and aspirations with a view to transforming the discourses, practices, and social relations where the category of "woman" is constructed in a way that implies subordination (Mouffe, 1999).

Finally, it is important to emphasis that with a restricted idea of politics, it is not possible to understand the specificity of the presence of women in their relation with the exercise of power, nor the alternative forms of political participation that they have generated. Politics cannot be taken to only refer to the formal public institutions, to the State, and to the parties. Rather, it includes the power relations that exist in all the spheres of human life. In these spheres of human life, it is the action that the women's organizations have decided to incur within the construction of alternative forms of organization and expression where the establishment of alliances at the local or micro level is found. This action can be incorporated into specific projects for women and the macro-policies of the State; that is, to take advantage of the spaces of local power with the objective of negotiating and being participants in the decision-making process.

The Daycare Mothers (ASOMAJ) and the Community Mothers (ASIBRU and AURORA) of Usme have been realizing a political exercise in the public arena for approximately 15 years, a feminine political exercise constituted by the accumulation of their experiences throughout their lives, of the experiences of other women of past and present generations, of their fears, and of their desires for a better quality of life for themselves and for the women that follow them. This group of more than 300 women from Usme are political actors that have impacted the development of their neighborhoods and of their locality, and they continue doing it in spite of the difficult circumstances that surround them. They are women that have developed during their process a high capacity to critique and to include the Other in spite of the differences that could exist. They are women who carry out development proposals for a sector of the society, as they themselves say, without having "*stepped into a university.*"

Impact

Maturana (1992) tells us that educating

> is constituted in the process in which one lives with another, and upon living with another, one is spontaneously transformed in a manner that one's way of life is progressively made more congruent with the other in the living space. The educating, therefore, always occurs in a reciprocal way, like a structural transformation that is contingent on a history of living together, which results in the people learning to live in a way that is configured according to the life of the community in which they live. (p. 57)

This statement is the foundation of the construction of pedagogical processes where the "Other" should be understood according to relational categories like gender, class, generation, and ethnicity, referring to the construction of citizens capable of questioning the environment and their particular condition. This gives way to actions through which an established social order is altered, and they are transformed into critical subjects configuring new forms of being. This positions forms of knowing, doing, and being that traditionally has not been incorporated into pedagogical exercises.

In the case of adult education and specifically what we have found in the educational proposals directed toward women, they do not consider these categories. Their timeframe is limited to the moment, and their projection is tied to producing instruments to improve the quality of their actions instead of guaranteeing that creative learning processes are carried out that include the characteristics and contexts of this population.

The research permitted the construction of an inclusive pedagogical proposal where the methodologies, knowledge, and instruments are differentiated and adjusted to the reality and particular conditions of the women from marginalized sectors. Also, it permitted the incorporation of the gender perspective in educational policies of governmental institutions as a transversal theme in the construction of curricula directed toward working with adult women. This was possible thanks to a process of sensitization to the decisive moments regarding the importance of constructing a populational look at the spaces of intervention, which are their responsibility.

Working at the level of public policy would guarantee the sustainability and continuity of this educational initiative that will have, in principle, the results of the research as a base. Being at the same time the base for further studies and expansions that nourish in a continuous way the adjustments and transformations of an educational policy for adults with gender perspective.

On the other hand, the planning exercises propitiated working spaces among women where their duty was questioned and the construction of collectivities from the feminine was initiated, where the subjectivities and conditions of the women are basic for making this space dynamic and for constructing pedagogical proposals from them with a gender view toward the adult and child population with which they work.

Last but not least, we want to mention as a valuable impact the fact that the women, at the individual and collective level, recognized that the learning processes are mediated by the cultural and social constructions that have constituted them throughout their history.

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